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Khomeini is seen knowing of deal

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WASHINGTON - Top US specialists on Iran now believe Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini probably knew about and sanctioned secret contacts with US officials since they began in December 1985, even though the administration insists it was aiming at closer relations with Iranian "moderates."

And while American weapons helped gain the release of three US hostages in Lebanon, the same officials believe three more recent victims are being held either by the same kidnappers or a group "in league" with them.

"We don't know if this was a scam to take the United States," one senior analyst declared. "But they knew exactly what they wanted and they got most of what they wanted."

Officials readily concede they don't have clear intelligence on what's happening inside Iran. But the assessment that Khomeini, the father of the Iranian revolution, must have known about the covert contacts is based on the following facts:

- Khomeini personally stepped in to quash calls for a parliamentary investigation of the US-Iranian dealings, questioning the motives of those calling for a probe.

- He hasn't fired anyone or branded anyone as disloyal for having dealt with "the Great Satan," his metaphor for the United States.

- He congratulated those who were involved in the deals for having helped cause "the great explosion which has occurred in Washington's Black House and the very important scandal which has gripped leaders of America."

- In the aftermath of the intense publicity, Iranian leaders now feel confident in offering to intervene on behalf of the remaining American hostages in Lebanon if the United States delivers \$350 million in arms now locked in US warehouses that were paid for by the shah of Iran before the 1979 Islamic revolution.

- Word that the United States was secretly selling arms to Tehran while pressing others not to has significantly weakened the effectiveness of the effort to block Western weapons sales, making it easier for Iran to get arms for its war with Iraq.

"We believe," one US official said, "that if there was a probe in Iran into the contacts, it would lead back to Khomeini himself or persons very close to him. His sub-

sequent reaction is an indication he knew and approved of it all along."

It would have been foolhardy - and potentially fatal - for officials to try to go behind Khomeini's back for extensive dealings with the United States if they thought he would oppose such contacts, the official noted.

Another official recalled that in 1979 Khomeini knew about the plan by radical students to seize the US Embassy and take hostages. He remained silent. "Only when it was clear it was working did he come out and support it," the official said. "He may well have followed the same pattern in this instance."

The story of American arms supplies and the secret visit to Iran by Robert McFarlane, a former national security adviser, first became public outside Tehran when the Lebanese magazine *Al Shiraa* broke a sensationalized version. The editor subsequently said the information came from supporters of Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montaseri, the officially designated heir apparent of Khomeini.

The story is believed to have been leaked in an effort to get back at Hashemi Rafsanjani, the speaker of the Iranian parliament, who was a prime mover in the US connection and who is thought to have inspired the arrest of a Montaseri in-law, Mehdi Hashemi, and several colleagues.

Rafsanjani's initial reaction, one day after the magazine's publication, suggested concern about how the contacts would be received by Iranians. He confirmed the McFarlane visit but lampooned it as involving improbable gifts of a cake, a Bible and pistols, and said the visitors were fobbed off to low-level intelligence officials.

"He wanted to make sure the story would not blow back on him," a US analyst said. "Apparently, at the beginning, no one knew how it would play in Iran."

But when seven deputies to the Majlis, the Iranian parliament, demanded that Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati explain whether the Foreign Ministry had sanctioned contacts with the Americans and whether there was any "legal authorization," Khomeini rushed forward to quash their effort.

"Why should you be influenced by foreign propaganda or by your

own egotism?" he demanded. Those raising such questions, Khomeini said, were either ignorant or had hidden motives. "I don't want to break your heart," he said, "but you shouldn't break the heart of our nation, our officials."

The first American hostage, Rev. Benjamin Weir, was released by Lebanese Shiites calling themselves Islamic Jihad on Sept. 14, 1986, following the delivery of two plane loads of arms approved by the administration and arranged by Israeli arms dealers.

After three deliveries by the United States of TOW antitank missiles and Hawk antiaircraft parts last spring and summer, including the flight carrying weapons and the McFarlane party to Tehran in May, the Rev. Lawrence Jenco was released on July 26. In late October, another US shipment was made and on Nov. 2 David P. Jacobsen was released.

However, in September and October, Americans Frank Reed, Joseph James Cicippio and Edward Austin Tracy were abducted from the streets of Beirut.

While various groups have claimed responsibility for the latest kidnappings, US officials say no specific demands have been made for their release. They suspect that either the original hostage-takers or an allied group is responsible.

Officials say they do not believe any of the kidnappings were at the behest of Iranian officials, but were aimed at putting pressure on the United States to persuade Kuwait to release 17 jailed Shiite terrorists.